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Some Factors Involved in Minimizing Race Friction on the Pacific Coast

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THE Japanese seem to be without doubt the most unpopular of all our immigrant peoples. Ever since they began to arrive on the Pacific Coast in sufficient numbers to attract attention they have been the subject of controversy at times so bitter that it has threatened to involve us in war with Japan. To all outward appearances the general attitude of Americans toward the Japanese is not becoming more favorable. Our newspaper press is again giving prominent space to our supposed grievances against the Japanese. While primarily this discussion centers around the situation in California, there is considerable evidence that throughout our whole country there exists an undercurrent of dislike for the Japanese that is brought to the surface upon slight provocation.

The interesting feature of this whole problem is that no charges are brought against the Japanese of incompetency, shiftlessness, lawlessness or revolutionary tendencies. On the contrary, even their enemies admit that they possess the qualities that are necessary for industrial success. If judgment is passed upon them from the point of view of thrift and enterprise and real ability to succeed, they must be given high rank among all our immigrant groups.

There is real justification, therefore, for the constantly recurring question as to what is after all the root of the whole difficulty. Why should the Japanese be denied what is so readily granted to the seemingly less competent immigrants from southern Europe? Where shall we find a satisfac-

tory explanation of the sharp discrimination against the Japanese? What is the way out of this clash of interest between the East and the West?

If we turn to our Federal Government for light on these questions, we are given a carefully guarded statement to the effect that there are no serious issues at stake between Japan and America. Our idealists calmly assure us that the trouble is at bottom economic rivalry which will decrease as the Japanese become better assimilated. The sensational newspaper press points out that Japan's interests will always clash with ours and that therefore we can not count on the loyalty of the Japanese immigrants. Those interested in the situation in the Orient state that Japan is using purposely the anti-Japanese agitation in California as a cloak behind which to hide her far-reaching plans for the exploitation of China and Manchuria. The Californians urge that Japanese aggression, if unchecked, will ultimately endanger white control of their state. The laboring classes insist that their situation becomes unendurable when they are subjected to competition with Orientals. The student of racial problems is confident that race friction is an inevitable result when races as unlike as the Japanese and Americans are brought into economic competition.

With this bewildering array of contradictory opinions it is not surprising to find many people, both Japanese and Americans, confused about the real issues involved and uncertain where to look for a solution. A recent significant effort to secure light on this

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perplexing problem has been made by Dr. Tasuku Harada, a well-known educator in Japan, formerly President of Doshisha University in Kyoto. Dr. Harada, who came to this country as a representative of the America-Japan Relations Committee of Japan, sent out a questionnaire to a number of leading Americans, in which he sought their views concerning some fundamental aspects of the Japanese problem. Among the responses made to this questionnaire the one submitted by Dr. Robert E. Park of the University of Chicago bears so directly upon this present discussion that his permission was secured to make quotations from it. In reply to Dr. Harada's first question, "What do you consider the principal reasons of the present anti-Japanese agitations in California; economic, social or racial," Dr. Park makes this convincing statement concerning the fundamental issue:

Racial competition, *i.e.*, competition between peoples differing in culture, language and race. Where racial differences are as marked, as they are in the case of the Japanese and the American, public sentiment opposes intermarriage. Where intermarriage does not take place assimilation is never complete and the difficulty of two races mutually accommodating themselves to one another, while maintaining each a separate racial existence, is bound to be very great. A racial group which is small in numbers, intimate, compact and well organized, as is the case with the Jew and the Japanese, has, in the long run, great advantages in competition with a larger and less organized community. If there are already racial prejudices, this kind of competition intensifies them.

A race problem growing out of the intermingling of races unlike in color and physical characteristics is, as James Bryce has said, the despair of statesmen. To the truth of this statement the long history of the association

of the white and colored races bears abundant witness. Generations of contact upon a basis of social inequality, whether in the form of slavery, exploitation or benevolent paternalism, have influenced our social traditions so deeply that we are disposed to react unfavorably to any suggestion looking toward social equality with the colored races. Traditionally they belong to a different caste with its prescribed limitations and sharply defined boundary lines. That this status should always be quietly acquiesced in is of course unthinkable. As a matter of fact the increasing determination of the colored races to insist upon equal rights has found its most recent and powerful expression in the Japanese whose national solidarity and strength fit them for this leadership. This long drawn out struggle, even though carried on along peaceful lines, is bound to bring with it race friction with all its attendant evils.

Here appears the fundamental difference between our Oriental and European immigration. The former involves a sufficient unlikeness of physical characteristics to make race fusion at least for the present impracticable; the latter is concerned with people who, however widely they may vary in culture and social status, in their physical appearance approximate very closely the usual American types. This distinction between the two types of immigrants is very apparent but its significance is not always kept clearly in mind. In discussions of the immigrant problem emphasis is usually placed on the adaptability of the incoming race to its new environment, by which is meant the ability to acquire the language of the people with whom they associate and to adopt their customs, habits and attitudes of mind. This matter of social assimilation is very rightly made an important test of

the fitness of any alien people for participation in American life. Its usefulness as a test, however, is somewhat invalidated if there exists in the race concerned any significant racial peculiarities not susceptible of modification through this assimilative process.

When races unlike in physical appearance are thrown together, it is evident that social assimilation can bring about at best only mental and not physical homogeneity. Whatever like-mindedness may be achieved, these racial marks still exist and cause them to be classified as members of their original race group.

No matter, therefore, how responsive the Japanese may be to their American environment, they must still form a separate group easily distinguished from people of the west. Their physical type marks them out as Orientals wherever they are. The race prejudice, which all aliens must face to a greater or less extent, tends to be perpetuated in the case of the Japanese long after the usual adjustments to their new environment have been made. The judgment that we pass upon the most cultured Japanese is colored by our instinctively unfavorable reaction to alien types. More serious even than this, they stand out as a symbol of the fears, dislikes and prejudices which enter into our traditional conception of the Asiatics. In spite of their evident efforts to adapt themselves to American conditions, our attitude of dislike remains unchanged. A decade or more ago we condemned them as undesirable because they were willing to work for low wages and brought with them such a low standard of living. Today, they are still unpopular and the charges made against them are that they demand high wages, insist upon owning land, are successful in business

competition, and desire to establish themselves as residents in white communities. The qualities that would ordinarily command respect become in their case a reproach and intensify our determination to have nothing to do with them.

If the underlying causes of race friction on the Pacific Coast are rooted in the fact of competition with a race so different from ours that complete assimilation is impossible, it is evident that no simple way out of the difficulty can be found. In reply to a further question in the questionnaire above referred to, in regard to a permanent solution of the Japanese problem, Dr. Park has this to say:

Competition between Japan and the United States, with a certain amount of irritation on both sides, is inevitable. However, Japan is more likely than the United States to profit by a quarrel in which the issue is one of race discrimination. If the people of California realized this fact it might considerably modify their attitude towards the present agitation. But the Japanese problem is a race problem; race problems are rooted in human nature; human nature changes, to be sure, but changes very slowly. First of all, it is important to recognize the facts. Race prejudice does exist. Just how this prejudice can be modified is a matter of which we know as yet too little. The experiences of groups of individuals who are now seeking to change racial prejudices in the communities in which they live are our only sources of information. What these experiences are, the Japanese Society knows better than anyone else.

The significance of this statement lies in the fact that it points out the nature of the issues involved and indicates that a satisfactory solution in the near future can not readily be brought about. Race prejudice dies down very slowly even under the most favorable circumstances. As a matter

of fact race problems are too deep-seated and too complicated to justify any hope that even the most enlightened legislative action would mean a final solution. The best that can be done is to take such steps as may reasonably be expected to bring about a gradual decrease of race friction.

While in problems of this kind grievances of course exist on both sides, there are two outstanding grievances the Japanese hold against the Americans, the removal of which will go far toward bringing about more harmonious relations between the two peoples. The first is the demand on the Pacific Coast for rigid exclusion laws aimed directly against the Japanese. That there must be a barrier to hold back the tide of Japanese immigration all agree. The Japanese conceded this fundamentally essential point more than a decade ago. At that time they undertook to restrict immigration to America by setting up and enforcing their own regulations and have evidently carried out their part of the agreement in good faith. The figures just made public in the 1920 census report show no alarming increase in our Japanese population. The chief increase in fact has largely consisted of Japanese women which will make possible a more normal family life for our Japanese population, and can be objected to only by those who favor such drastic measures as would ultimately drive all Japanese out of our country.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the Japanese and the American governments have in force an agreement for the restriction of Japanese immigration, there is a persistent agitation in California for a new treaty with Japan in which should be definitely included an exclusion clause. Such a demand is a blow against the

self-respect of the Japanese which is bound to increase race friction. Certainly nothing can be gained by any failure on our part to pay due regard to the sensitiveness of the Japanese on the subject of race discrimination. The propaganda carried on by the Japanese Exclusion League of California and by a certain portion of our newspaper press for rigid exclusion laws is very ill-advised and, if persisted in, may lead to more serious racial misunderstandings.

The other serious grievance against America is our refusal to grant to the Japanese the rights of citizenship. Such a course of action is essentially unjust and is evidence of our disinclination to give the Japanese immigrants a fair chance to make good in our country. In spite of the fact that they have been lawfully admitted to America, they are condemned to remain among us as aliens and are therefore subject to all the disabilities that we may choose to inflict upon those who retain their foreign status. Nothing can be more detrimental to our welfare than to have in our midst an alien group which can not look forward to active participation in our political life. The Japanese are right in demanding that steps be taken by our Federal Government to give the Orientals who can qualify the same rights of citizenship as are open to other foreigners.

The importance of such a step in decreasing race friction between Japan and America can hardly be overestimated. The time has gone by when complete isolation of races is possible. The Japanese in considerable numbers are here among us and no matter what barriers are raised against their coming, we have every reason to believe that we will always be thrown in contact with them.

Sound statesmanship demands a policy that looks toward a more intimate relationship in the future between the East and the West rather than to a more complete separation.

Desirable as may seem these practical measures designed to diminish race friction, it is useless to ignore the serious difficulties in the way of putting them into effect. It must be borne in mind that the Americans and Japanese are approaching the problem of racial contacts from fundamentally opposing points of view. To the Americans the proper solution seems to be the caste system which has been our traditional method of establishing a working relationship with the colored races. Under this system the Japanese are assigned a definite status and racial harmony prevails as long as this status is maintained.

The Japanese on the other hand insist that their association with us shall be on the basis of race equality. That they should be permanently made to occupy an inferior place or forced into a position where they do not have full enjoyment of economic and political oppor-

tunities is from their point of view unjust and therefore intolerable.

When the issue is stated in these terms, the significant nature of the controversy is apparent. It is very evident that America has allowed itself to be placed in an awkward position that is rapidly becoming untenable. Our treatment of the Orientals can not gain wide and continued support because it is economically unsound and contrary to our political ideals. In a dispute of this kind the Japanese have everything to gain by keeping in the foreground the issue of race discrimination. Their desire to remove the stigma of racial inequality must gain increasing support among thoughtful and high-minded people. Any determined and widespread opposition to them in this struggle will simply strengthen their national solidarity and make their leadership in the Orient more secure. Our future peaceful relations with the whole Orient depends upon our ability to develop a national policy that will diminish rather than increase race friction on the Pacific Coast.